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BUYING GUIDES FOR COSTUME SLIPS

Costume slips make up a large part of practically every woman's annual clothing expenditure, yet there are no hard and fast rules for the purchaser to follow so as to be certain of getting the qualities wanted. Handle and appearance are not reliable guides. Labels, while a very desirable medium for giving proper information, too often carry statements that are both indefinite and misleading. This was recently revealed in a study made at the University of Cincinnati. Sixteen out of seventeen slips labeled "100% Pure Silk" were tested and found to be heavily weighted.

The Federal Trade Commission is taking action against misrepresentations of this kind, but we need to be alert to their existence and buy discriminately. Not only must we be aware of the varying qualities of materials but also of the values in cut and construction. Oftentimes special features of design and seaming are devised and widely advertised but more for sales appeal than for their real merit in wear.

When selecting a costume slip remember that its purpose is to protect your dress from body soil, to serve as a basis for the proper appearance of your dress, and during the winter, perhaps, help to keep the body warm. The type of material and style to choose depends on the particular purpose that you expect the slip to serve. For example, a slip for wear under a tailored street dress should be extremely simple in cut and of sturdy, practical material, while one to be worn with a transparent afternoon or evening frock needs lines and material in harmony with those of the dress.

Fabrics

Fabrics commonly used in slips are silk, synthetics, linen, or cotton. Wool is occasionally used, but mostly in knit slips where warmth rather than dress protection and appearance is the main purpose. The types of fabrics ordinarily used are: in silks and synthetics--French crepe, satin, crepe de chine, and taffeta; in linen--handkerchief linen; and in cotton--nainsook and broadcloth. All of these fabrics come in varying qualities, which naturally affect the amount of wear you can get out of them, as well as the kind of construction you should look for when buying.

The quality of cottons and linens is easier to judge than of silks and synthetics. The main points to look for in cotton are a close, strong-looking even weave, a soft texture, and a smooth, slick surface. In a good grade, cotton wears well even with hard treatment. Notice carefully to see if there is sizing which makes the weave look closer than it really is. You can sometimes tell excessive sizing by rubbing a piece of the cloth between your hands, then looking to see if any white dust particles were stirred up or if the fabric is more limp.

Notice also if the fabric looks fuzzy. If so, that cotton will very likely be a "sticky" one to wear and will bunch uncomfortably under the dress. A mercerized cotton fabric is more likely to have a smooth, slick texture than an unmercerized one. Read labels or inquire for definite information about color fastness and shrinkage. Manufacturers can now have both their cottons and linens completely shrunk at little additional cost and this is assurance that a slip will fit as well after washing as before. Slips that are not pre-shrunk may be uncomfortable and ill-fitting after washing.

Silks and synthetics usually drape to the figure better than cottons, making a very good basis for a dress. However, they are more varied in kind and quality. In fact, a silk or synthetic slip can be had at practically any price from thirty-nine cents on up. It is often difficult to distinguish between low-grade and high-grade slips in both silks and synthetics. One slip may "look just as good" as another to anyone not familiar with what wears and what does not wear. In poor quality slips the fabrics are sized, dyed, and pressed to appear, when displayed in the store, as much like good quality merchandise as possible. Also, low grade slips are trimmed with laces and embroideries which, though inferior, give practically the same general effect as those on better goods.

It pays to look beneath all this surface "niceness" and find the real quality of a slip. Notice details. Examine a fabric without thought of the color, and see if it is firm and evenly woven rather than loose, filled with sizing, and pressed hard to spread the yarns and give a lustrous finish. Pull the fabric slightly between the thumb and finger to see if the yarns shift easily. Oftentimes the weave of a fabric is not properly balanced; that is, there are too few filling yarns for the number in the warp. This allows the warp yarns to slide first this way and that after a little wear; then the fabric takes on a blistered appearance which spoils the shape of the slip and eventually it breaks. This is a very common trouble, particularly with French crepes and price is no safeguard. In higher priced slips the yarns may shift as badly as in lower priced garments.

Occasionally labels are attached to slips stating that the yarns "will not shift," but such statements are as yet rare, so ask about this quality. Don't be content with "We have had no complaints." Such an answer is evasive and there is no way of knowing how many dissatisfied women have not taken the trouble to complain or make returns.

Insist on definite information, preferably printed on a manufacturer's label or tag, about the weighting and loading of silks and synthetics. There are many carelessly worded and misleading statements, so take care not to read more into them than they actually state.

In accordance with a trade agreement drawn up under the auspices of the Federal Trade Commission, "pure dye" means that the silk contains no more than 10 per cent of any kind of weighting or substance other than silk; that is, provided the silk is white or a light color. On blacks, the same statement can mean that as much as 15 percent weightin, may have been added.

Color fastness in lingerie silks has had little attention as yet. Some materials fade quickly; others change little, if any, in color. So ask for definite information. Clerks sometimes settle such inquiries by suggesting that you can tint the slip as you wash it, in case the colors do fade. This can be done, but it causes extra trouble and expense.

Until recently, practically all silk and synthetic slips had to be purchased with a guess allowance for shrinkage. But now you can get them "pre-washed" or "guaranteed not to shrink."

### Cut and fit

A style of slip suited to your figure, accuracy of cut, and good fit have much to do with durability as well as comfort. Bias cuts predominate now, but there are also many straight slips. In either type there are both good and poorly cut garments so the way to get the slip that fits your figure is to try it on. Few of us take the time and trouble to do this. And if we do, the chances are we just pull the slip on over a dress. To judge size and fit in this way is inaccurate and can be the cause of many troubles. Also, once we get a garment home we are likely to keep it even though it doesn't fit correctly. To make an exchange is troublesome. But to keep an ill-fitting garment is expensive because clothes that do not fit properly get abnormal strain and wear out sooner than they would otherwise. So take time and care to be properly fitted.

When trying on a slip, notice particularly how it fits about the hips. Is it smooth fitting and will it allow sitting room without strain? Are there wrinkles and bulges about the waistline that will spoil the appearance of your dress? Does it fit neatly and smoothly over the bust and under the arms? What about the length? Does it hang evenly or is it short in front and longer at the sides? Better have the salesperson check this. A slip that is too short or hangs unevenly looks bad through thin dresses, and if too long or uneven you will have to take time for alterations before you can wear it.

Many slips nowadays have adjustable straps to which your attention will likely be called in case you question the length. These help to a certain extent, but even so they cannot be pulled up too far. Once they are adjusted so as to fit the slip to your bust and shoulders they can hardly be jerked up and down without spoiling the fit unless the slip is perfectly straight.

### Workmanship

Notice how a slip is seamed and finished. Workmanship can lengthen or lessen the lifetime of your garment, and it also can make ironing easier or harder. Whatever type of seams and finishes are used, they should be flat, smooth, without decided ridges or bumps, and equal to the material in durability. Thread used for stitching should be strong, and neither too heavy nor too fine for the material. And close, fine stitching, about 16 to 18 stitches per inch, always holds better than the long, loose kind that manufacturers of low-grade slips use so as to save thread.

The best type of seams for a slip depends somewhat on the style and also the material; that is, whether the seam lines are on the straight or bias and whether the material tends to fray or is firm. Seams closely lock-stitched with about 18 to 20 stitches per inch are strong and usually last as long as the slip itself. One objection is that they sometimes hold little spots of soil that are almost impossible to wash out, and under smooth, soft dresses these seams show as slight ridges. The wide, loose lock-stitching of only 6 or 8 stitches per inch, such as is used in low-grade slips, is little or no good. The poor quality materials and skimmed cuts that go with such workmanship only help the stitching to pull out.

Plain seams pinked and then stitched a second time from the right side are flat and fairly serviceable on bias seam lines. But on lines that follow the lengthwise or crosswise threads they are very likely to pull out.

Standing fells, which are narrow and have a hard cord-like feeling and appearance, are most commonly used in medium grade slips. Sometimes they hold well, again they pull out in the first laundering. The reason is that in making these seams one side is trimmed off, the other is folded over and stitched down on it. The cut side is oftentimes trimmed too closely; then again the material may fray, thus allowing the seam to pull out. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing good from bad standing fells when you are buying because the part that causes the trouble is hidden inside the seam. The safest thing is to avoid this type of seam unless the manufacturer or store is willing to assure you definitely that there is no danger it will pull out. However, at its best, a standing fell is always thick, stiff, and somewhat difficult to iron.

In hand-made slips, French seams are almost invariably used. Sometimes there is a third stitching which holds them flat to the garment rather than standing. This gives extra strength which is practical because hand made garments are naturally more delicate than the machine made.

#### Finishes and trim

The finish of the top edge and hem, like the rest of the slip, should be simple, but strong. Some tailored slips have a double layer of fabric for the bodice and double stitching around the top edge; other slips are lace trimmed; still others are bound or shell stitched.

Lace- or net-trimmed slips probably need most careful examination. The best buys have simple insets of lace and no meaningless little spots of lace scattered here and there. The lace itself will be uniform in construction, not heavily corded and thick in one place while very delicate in another. Such lace invariably breaks because of the contrast in weight. Lace at the lower edge is undesirable unless you are absolutely certain the length is right, that the slip hangs evenly, and no adjustments will ever be necessary.

Usually lace is applied to the top of the slip by lock stitching like that used in seams. At the front, the slip fabric is trimmed away from underneath the lace, so you should notice to see that it is not cut off too closely. If it is, the lace and fabric will pull apart, making holes that can hardly be repaired neatly or durably. The straight lace edging used across the upper back and around the lower edge is likewise best applied with lock stitch. However, because of the straight rather than the designed edge, the slip fabric can be turned back on itself, making a neater, more durable joining. Sometimes lace is stitched in one with a little hem. This is durable but not as smooth for ironing as the lock-stitch joining.

Good binding is always narrow, even in width, smoothly fitted to the edge, double stitched, and no heavier than is absolutely necessary. Bias that is haphazardly cut and put on twists and rolls in ironing. When thick and heavy it causes the fabric to break along the first line of stitching. In good quality slips the seam allowance is wide enough so it can fold over with the bias which prevents pulling off.

Occasionally some other trim besides the edge finish is used on slips. It may be embroidery, drawn work, or appliqué. Whatever it is, make certain that it does not weaken the fabric. Criss-cross rows of hemstitching is an example of trim that weakens. See also that applied trim is neither lumpy nor heavy. To wear as well as the slip, it should be smooth and flat in keeping with the light weight of slip materials. If heavy and rough, the contrast will cause the trim to tear out, leaving holes. Lumpy embroidery is also troublesome to iron and it may show unattractively under a dress of soft fabrics.

#### Shoulder straps

On machine-made slips, the most common type of shoulder straps are made of silk like the slip--a double fold, cut either biaswise or lengthwise, and stitched on both edges. These are durable and they usually last as long as the slip, but the stitching tightens somewhat on washing and makes them a bit troublesome to iron smoothly.

Ribbon is rarely used on slips except on the lower grade slips. Then it is ribbed similar to grosgrain, and while not especially durable wears probably as long as the slips on which it is used.

Straps on hand-made slips are usually straight-cut folds stitched once and turned. These, like the slips, are neat and dainty but not the most durable. They eventually break off where sewed to the slip and have to be replaced.

The way straps are attached to a slip should be noticed. If there is lace at the top edge, straps should extend on down to the fabric. Lace, even of the best quality, is too delicate to stand the pull of straps. If straps are made to branch off and attach in two places rather than one, the strain is distributed so that the lace is not so likely to be torn.

If the top edge of a slip is bound, straps are usually caught to the edge of the binding. They in time will cause the material to break where the bias is stitched to the slip unless there are fabric reinforcements. These are not commonly used as yet; so if you buy a slip without them, you will do well to sew reinforcements on the wrong side with inconspicuous blind stitching.